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ABSTRACT

As part of the October 1972 Current Population Survey, data were obtained for the first time on the school enrollment status of persons 35 years of age and over, by type of school and labor force status. This survey differs from Office of Education figures on adult education in that it includes only those persons going to school to earn a degree or to train for an occupation. It reveals that 1.5 million adults 35 years of age and over were enrolled in or attending school in October, 1972. Of students age 35 and over, three-fourths are in the labor force and more than half are in college. Data in tables are differentiated further by sex, age, and race. Implications for further research indicated by the author are the factors inducing older adults to return to school, follow-up information on the uses made of education and training taken in mature years, and financing of schooling. (EA)

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Going Back to School at 35

Special Labor Force Report 159

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
Bureau of Labor Statistics
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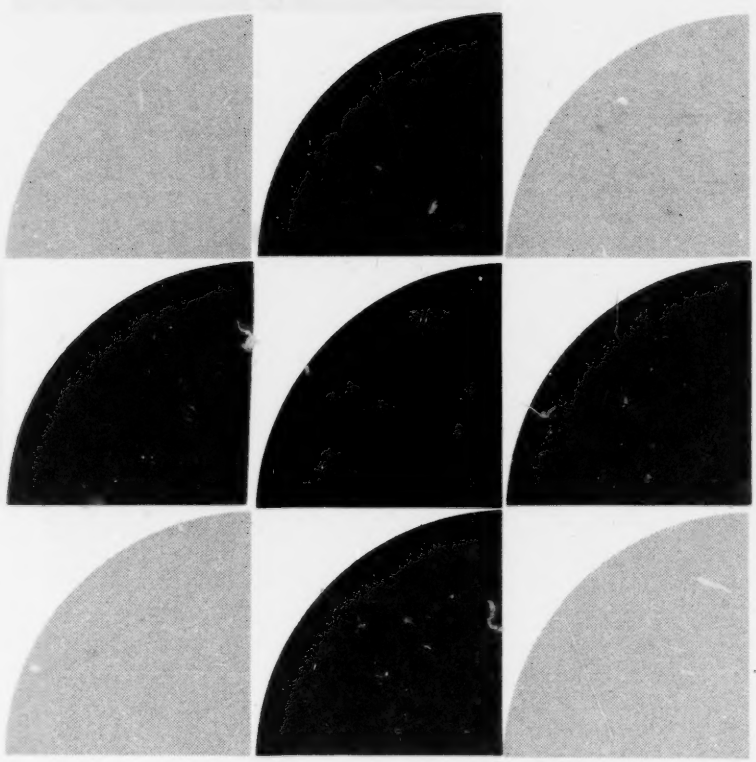

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Going back to school at 35

Special Labor Force Report based on new data from the Current Population Survey reveals that of students age 35 and over, three-fourths are in the labor force and more than half are in college

ANNE M. YOUNG

ONE OF 50 MEN AND WOMEN age 35 and over are using their leisure time to go "back to school." Many are studying to keep up with new developments in their chosen field or to obtain the credentials necessary to enter a different line of work. Some are housewives taking college courses to obtain an undergraduate or graduate degree before reentering the labor market. Others are workers seeking a high school diploma or college degree in response to rising employer hiring and promotion requirements. Undoubtedly, many also perceive of schooling as a means for personal development.

As part of the October 1972 Current Population Survey, data were obtained for the first time on the school enrollment status of persons 35 years of age and over, by type of school and labor force status.[1] Only persons enrolled in elementary, secondary, college, graduate, or professional schools or in business, trade, or vocational schools outside regular school systems were included in the data.[2] For simplicity, in this article, the former are called "regular schools," the latter, "trade and vocational schools."

Data in this report differ from Office of Education figures on adult education because this survey is more limited in scope and includes only those persons going to school to earn a degree or to train for an occupation. Outside its compass, for example, are the millions of persons who are flocking to classes in the arts, such as painting, ceramics, or weaving, and practical courses in auto repair, furniture refinishing, and the like, which enrich their lives and augment their home maintenance skills but are not primarily designed for career development or professional advancement. The data in this report cover only persons enrolled during the survey week; in contrast, data published by the Office of Education cover learning over an entire year.[3]

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The survey revealed that 1.5 million adults 35 years of age and over were enrolled in or attending school in October 1972. Somewhat over half were enrolled in college, including graduate school (780,000); almost two-fifths were attending trade or vocational schools (570,000); and the remainder were enrolled in elementary or high school (100,000).

The proportion in college was about the same for men as for women and for whites as for Negroes.[4] (See table 1.) However, there was a sharp difference between whites and Negroes in the proportions enrolled in trade or vocational schools and in elementary or high school. Among whites, nearly all the students not in college were in trade or vocational schools, but among Negroes, about the same proportion was enrolled in elementary or high school as in trade or vocational schools.

Three-fourths of the students, about 1.1 million, were also in the labor force. About the same number of men as of women were in school, but a greater proportion of the men was working or seeking work. (See table 2.) Men were equally likely to be in the labor force whether they were in regular schools or in trade or vocational schools. Among women, however, the proportion working or seeking work was higher for those in regular school.

Adults in college

Almost 800,000 adults were in college—either as undergraduates or in graduate school. Over half (53 percent) were women; among college students under age 35 only about 42 percent were women. Fewer than 100,000, about 12 percent, of the adult college students were Negroes, about the same proportion as among college students under age 35.

About 8 out of 10 of the male college students were going to school part time. (See table 3.) Almost all of these men were in the labor force (98

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Table 1. Type of school attended by persons 35 years old and over, by sex and race, October 1972

[In percent]

Sex and race	Total		Elementary and high school	College		Trade or vocational[1]
	Number (in thousands)	Percent		Full time	Part time	
Both sexes	1,458	100.0	6.9	9.1	45.0	39.1
Men	710	100.0	6.3	10.8	41.0	41.8
Women	748	100.0	7.4	7.4	48.8	36.5
White	1,289	100.0	5.0	8.4	45.7	40.9
Negro and other races	169	100.0	20.7	14.2	39.6	25.4

[1] In the Current Population Survey, this category is called "special schools."

percent), a rate comparable to that for all men age 35 to 44, the middle age group in the survey. Among men in college full time, about 65 percent were in the labor force, and some of them were probably working part time. Many of the men in college full time probably received financial support not only from grants and fellowships but also from working wives.

The overwhelming majority of women age 35 and over in college in October 1972 were going to school part time. Nearly 3 out of 4 of these part-time students were working or seeking work, a proportion much higher than for women in the same age group who were not in school. Seven out of 10 of all women college students age 35 and over were married, and nearly all of these women were in school part time. Even though they had home responsibilities, the great majority of these married women students were in the labor force in October 1972. The following tabulation indicates the labor force status (in thousands) of married women in college part time (rates are not shown where base is less than 75,000):

Age	*Total*	*Number in labor force*	*Percent in labor force*
Total, age 35 and over	262	170	65
35 to 39 years of age	78	39	50
40 to 44 years	86	52	60
45 years and over	98	79	81
45 to 49 years	60	47	..
55 years and over	38	32	..

The labor force participation rates for these women varied widely by age. The rate was lowest

Table 2. Employment status of persons 35 years old and over enrolled in school, by kind of school, age, sex, and race, October 1972

[Numbers in thousands]

Sex, age, and race	In school				In regular school[1]				In trade or vocational school[2]			
	Total	Labor force		Not in labor force	Total	Labor force		Not in labor force	Total	Labor force		Not in labor force
		Number	Percent of total in school			Number	Percent of total in school			Number	Percent of total in school	
Both sexes, total	1,458	1,105	75.8	353	888	675	76.0	213	570	430	75.4	140
35 to 39 years	545	415	76.1	130	367	278	75.7	89	178	137	77.0	41
40 to 44 years	348	262	75.3	86	218	161	73.9	57	130	101	77.7	29
45 to 49 years	246	190	77.2	56	152	118	77.6	34	94	72	76.6	22
50 to 54 years	156	127	81.4	29	82	66	80.5	16	74	61	[3]	13
55 years and over	163	111	68.1	52	69	52	[3]	17	94	59	62.8	35
Men, total	710	640	90.1	70	413	365	88.4	48	297	275	92.6	22
35 to 39 years	318	295	92.8	23	209	191	91.4	18	109	104	95.4	5
40 to 44 years	158	148	93.7	10	91	81	89.0	10	67	67	[3]	[3]
45 years and over	234	197	84.2	37	113	93	82.3	20	121	104	86.0	17
Women, total	748	465	62.2	283	475	310	65.3	165	273	155	56.8	118
35 to 39 years	227	120	52.9	107	158	87	55.1	71	69	33	[3]	36
40 to 44 years	190	114	60.0	76	127	80	63.0	47	63	34	[3]	29
45 years and over	331	231	69.8	100	190	143	75.3	47	141	88	62.4	53
White	1,289	968	75.1	321	762	571	74.9	191	527	397	75.3	130
Negro and other races	169	137	81.1	32	126	104	82.5	22	43	33	[3]	10

[1] Regular schools are part of a recognized regular school system, public, private, or parochial. They can be schools at any level—elementary, high, college, or professional. Regular schools may advance a person toward an elementary school certificate or high school diploma, or a college or professional school degree.

[2] In the Current Population Survey, these schools are termed "special schools." They are outside regular school systems and offer trade, business, vocational, or other job-related courses designed primarily to transmit a skill.

[3] Percent not shown where base is less than 75,000.

Table 3. Labor force status of persons enrolled in regular school, by type of school, age, and sex, October 1972

[Numbers in thousands]

Type of school and age	Both sexes				Men				Women			
	Population	Labor force		Not in labor force	Population	Labor force		Not in labor force	Population	Labor force		Not in labor force
		Number	Percent of population			Number	Percent of population			Number	Percent of population	
Enrolled in regular school	888	675	76.0	213	413	365	88.4	48	475	310	65.3	165
Elementary or high school	100	59	59.0	41	45	29	(1)	16	55	30	(1)	25
College, full time	132	65	49.2	67	77	50	64.9	27	55	15	(1)	40
College, part time	656	551	84.0	105	291	286	98.3	5	365	265	72.6	100
35 to 39 years	258	215	83.3	43	153	152	99.3	1	106	64	60.4	42
40 to 44 years	176	139	79.0	37	63	63	(1)		113	76	67.3	37
45 years and over	222	197	88.7	25	75	71	94.7	4	146	125	85.6	21

[1] Percent not shown where base is less than 75,000.

for women students age 35 to 39, an age group in which women are most likely to have teenage or younger children at home, and highest among women age 45 and over.

Adults in elementary or secondary school

About 100,000 persons age 35 and over were in elementary or high school in October 1972. Some of these persons may need educational credentials in order to get a job or to advance in their present job. Others may have personal reasons for returning to school—perhaps to communicate better with their children, perhaps to satisfy a long-delayed ambition to finish school.

These adults were enrolled in basic education classes at the elementary school level or in general education classes which prepare for the high school equivalency examination. As many were age 45 and over as were 35 to 39 years old. Slightly more than half were women. Six out of 10 of all the students enrolled in elementary or high school classes were working or seeking work, not significantly different from the proportion for all middle-aged persons who were not high school graduates.

Negroes 35 years of age and over who were enrolled in a regular school were more likely to be enrolled below the college level than were whites. Twenty-one percent of enrolled Negroes were in elementary or high school, four times the rate for whites.

Acquiring a skill

About 40 percent (570,000) of all persons age 35 and over who were attending school in October 1972 were in trade or vocational schools. These schools may or may not require a high school diploma for entrance and vary greatly in kind of training offered and in hours of instruction. Such schools provide instruction in a wide range of skills including truck-driving, electronics, auto mechanics, barbering, secretarial training, bookkeeping, practical nursing, and cosmetology. Men and women were enrolled in these schools in about equal numbers in October 1972. Most of the men and more than half of the women were in the labor force.

Adults in trade or vocational schools tended to be older than those in regular schools: about 45 percent of those in such schools were age 45 or over; about 34 percent of those in regular schools were in this age group. Older workers may be more interested in going to these schools to learn a specific skill rather than investing several years to obtain more generalized training in college.

Women in trade or vocational schools were less likely to be working or seeking work than women in college were, partly because women who enter such schools may have had fewer years of schooling than women who enter or return to college, and labor force rates tend to be directly related to years of schooling.

OLDER ADULTS who go back to school while also working at their jobs or taking care of home responsibilities demonstrate a strong drive for self improvement. The foregoing analysis provides information on the extent to which older adults are going to college and to vocational schools, but additional information is needed to understand with greater cer-

tainty the factors inducing their return to school, in many cases after lengthy absences.

Moreover, followup information on the uses made of education and training taken in mature years would be useful in counseling or advising others in similar circumstances, particularly with respect to women who enter paid employment when family responsibilities decline. Also, it would be useful to know how older enrollees finance the costs of schooling. □

FOOTNOTES

[1] This article is based on supplementary questions in the October 1972 Current Population Survey, conducted and tabulated for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. Data presented in this article relate to persons 35 years of age and over in the civilian noninstitutional population in the calendar week ending October 14, 1972. All members of the Armed Forces and inmates of institutions are excluded.

Since the estimates are based on a sample, they may differ from the figures that would have been obtained from a complete census. Sampling variability may be relatively large in cases where the numbers are small. Small estimates, or small differences between estimates, should be interpreted with caution.

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[2] In the Current Population Survey, schools which are part of a regular recognized school system are called "regular schools" and may advance a person toward an elementary school certificate, high school diploma, or college or professional degree. Vocational and trade schools outside the regular school system are referred to as "special schools" in the survey. They offer job-related courses designed primarily to transmit a skill. Persons taking courses for social or recreational purposes are not included in the survey.

[3] See *Perspective of Adult Education in the United States and a Projection for the Future*, Report for the Third International Conference on Adult Education, Sponsored by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Tokyo, Japan, July 24–Aug. 7, 1972 (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1972), and Imogene E. Okes, *Participation in Adult Education 1969, Initial Report* (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1971).

[4] Data for all persons other than white are used in this report to represent data for Negroes, since the latter constitute about 89 percent of all persons other than white in the United States.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

THE ESTIMATES in this report are based on supplementary questions in the October 1972 Current Population Survey conducted and tabulated for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. The basic labor force concepts, sample design, estimating methods, and reliability of the data are described briefly in the following sections.[1]

DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Population Coverage. Each month trained interviewers collect information from a sample of about 47,000 households located in 461 areas in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The estimates for this report include persons 35 years of age and over in the civilian noninstitutional population in the calendar week ending October 14, 1972. The civilian noninstitutional population excludes all members of the Armed Forces and inmates of institutions, such as homes for the aged and correctional institutions.

School Enrollment. The school enrollment statistics are based on replies to the enumerator's inquiry as to whether the person was enrolled in day or night school in any type of public, parochial, or other private school in the regular school system. Such schools include elementary schools, junior or senior high schools, and colleges or universities. Persons enrolled in special schools not in the regular school system, such as trade schools or business colleges, are classified as enrolled in "special schools." Persons enrolled in classes which do not require physical presence in school, such as correspondence courses or other courses of independent study and training courses given directly on the job, are not reported as enrolled in a school.

Full-Time and Part-Time Enrollment in College. A person is classified as enrolled in college full time if he was taking 12 hours of classes or more during an average school week, and part time if he was taking fewer hours.

Age. The age classification is based on the age of the person at his last birthday.

Race. The population is divided into three groups on the basis of race: white, Negro, and "other races." The last category includes American Indians, Japanese, and Chinese, and any other race except white and Negro.

Employed . Employed persons are all those who, during the survey week, (a) did any work at all as paid employees or in their own business or profession, or on their own farm, or who worked 15 hours or more as unpaid workers in an enterprise operated by a member of the family, or (b) did not work but had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent because of illness, bad weather, vacation, labor-management dispute, or for personal reasons, whether or not they were paid by their employers for the time off, and whether or not they were seeking other jobs.

Unemployed. Unemployed persons are all those who did not work during the survey week, made specific efforts to find a job within the preceding 4 weeks, and were available for work or would have been available during the survey week except for temporary illness. Also included as unemployed are those who did not work at all, were available for work, and (a) were waiting to be called back to a job from which they had been laid off, or (b) were waiting to report to a new wage or salary job within 30 days.

Civilian Labor Force. The civilian labor force comprises the total of all civilian persons classified as employed or unemployed according to the above definitions.

Not in the Civilian Labor Force . All persons not classified as employed or unemployed are defined as not in labor force. Persons doing only incidental unpaid family work (less than 15 hours a week) are also classified as not in the labor force.

Sums of Distribution. Sums of individual items, whether absolute numbers or percentages, may not equal totals because of independent rounding of totals and components. Percentage totals, however, are always shown as 100 percent.

RELIABILITY OF THE ESTIMATES

Estimating Procedure. The estimating procedure used in this survey inflates weighted sample results to independent estimates of civilian noninstitutional population by age, race, and sex. These independent estimates are based on statistics from the 1970 Census of Population and other data on births, deaths, immigration, and emigration, and strength of the Armed Forces.

Variability . Since the estimates are based on a sample, they may differ somewhat from the figures that would have been obtained if a complete census had been taken using the same schedules and procedures. As in any survey, the results are also subject to errors of response and reporting. These may be relatively large in the case of persons with irregular attachment to the labor force. Particular care should be exercised in the

interpretation of figures based on relatively small estimates as well as small differences between figures.

The standard error is primarily a measure of sampling variability, that is, of the variations that might occur by chance because only a sample rather than the entire population is surveyed. As calculated for this report, the standard error also partially measures the effect of response and enumeration errors but does not measure any systematic biases in the data. The chances are about 2 out of 3 that an estimate from the sample would differ from a complete census by less than the standard error. The chances are about 19 out of 20 that the difference would be less than twice the standard error.

Table 1 shows approximations of the standard errors of percentages in this survey. They should be interpreted as indicators of the order or magnitude of the standard error rather than a precise standard error for any specific item.

The following example illustrates how the table can be used. The 1,105,000 persons 35 years of age and over enrolled in school who were in the labor force in October 1972 represented 75.8 percent of all persons 35 and over enrolled in school. Table 1 shows the standard error of 75.8 percent with a base of 1,458,000 to be about 1.7 percent. Consequently, the chances are 2 out of 3 that a complete census count would have disclosed the figure to be between 74.1 and 77.5 percent, and 19 out of 20 that the figure would have been between 72.4 and 79.2 percent.

The reliability of an estimated percentage that is based on sample data for both numerator and denominator depends upon the size of the percentage and the size of the total upon which the percentage is based. Estimated percentages are relatively more reliable than the corresponding absolute estimates of the numerators of the percentage, particularly if the percentage is large (50 percent or greater).

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[1] For a more complete description of the methodology, see Concepts and Methods Used in Manpower Statistics from the Current Population Survey (BLS Report No. 313).

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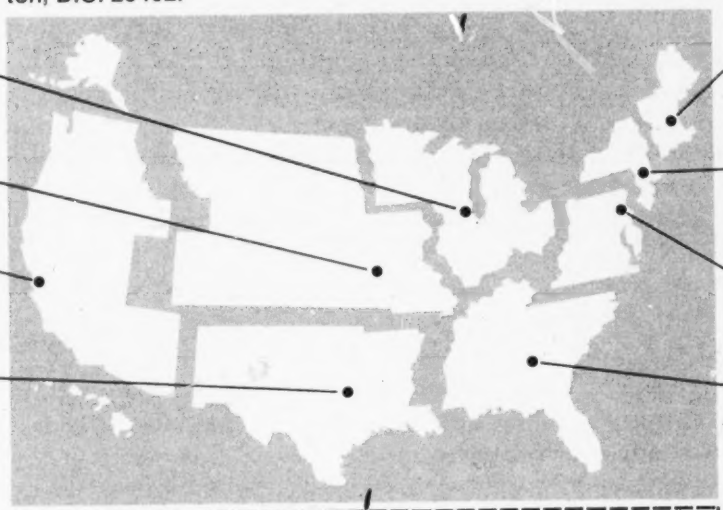

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